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ABSTRACT

This paper defines an already existing body of literature in trade books whose intrinsic characteristics provide a superstructure of support that make it particularly attractive to readers engaged in ongoing growth beyond beginning or emergent reading who, for whatever reason, cannot be considered mature or independent enough readers to engage comfortably a text form such as "the novel." The paper explores the characteristics of the genre; traces its roots and origins; provides examples of transitional literature available in trade books (and reasons why children like or dislike them); attempts to establish judgment criteria; and supplies a list of such literature for use in classrooms as well as suggestions for ways to use it. A 22-item bibliography and an appendix of suggested transitional literature titles conclude the paper. (SR)

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READER BRIDGES
Transitional Literature: The Role of Superstructure in the Life of the Reader

By
Helen Wallhausen

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READER BRIDGES

Transitional Literature:
The Role of Superstructure in the Life of the Reader

INTRODUCTION

Transitional Literature in the title conjures up the image of passage from one place to another, as does the word *bridge*. Webster defines *transition* as "a passing from one condition, form, stage, activity, place, etc., to another." Indeed, the Latin *trans* means "over, across" The word *bridge* completes the image. Webster defines it as "a structure built over a river, highway, etc., to provide a way across for vehicles or pedestrians." Why do readers need bridges?

RATIONALE

Classical and modern literature abounds with transition metaphors as in "crossing the river Styx," Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar," and the Newbery Award-winning children's book *Bridge to Terabithia*. Whether one regards physical, cognitive, emotional, and social growth in terms of stages of development or as a phenomenon that is continuous and evolving, most people agree that human beings are not static. They are involved in change.

So, readers are involved in change and growth across their lives as readers. Educators disagree on whether growth in reading should be viewed in stages or as continuous. Jeanne Chall and Don Holdaway (*Independence in Reading*) identify definite stages in reading growth while Harste, Burke (*Language Stories and Literary Lessons*) and the Goodmans (*What's Whole in Whole Language*) regard growth as more constant and ongoing, and less abrupt.

We smile at the four-year-old child who tries on her mother's shoes. No one would seriously consider allowing her to wear them all the time, nor would she choose them. They are cumbersome and slow her progress. Just so, all educators and parents would

agree that handing a seven-year-old or an eleven-year-old a copy of *The Brothers Karamazov* to read is equally ridiculous, nor would the child choose to read it. Progress would be slow and cumbersome.

As the four-year-old moves toward adult physical growth, her outgrown shoes document her progress. Her new shoes more closely approximate her mother's adult models. The structure of the shoes themselves assists and contributes to the simultaneous shaping of her physical growth. They become just one of many components involved in the growth process. (Lincoln and Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry*). The first hard-soled baby shoes which support the first tentative steps and are bronzed and preserved help to bridge a transitional period of continuous physical growth in her life. In like manner, she grows cognitively as a reader. Like the outgrown shoes, the books she owns and engages document her progress along the path to cognitive maturity as reader. The texts themselves become simultaneous shapers in the growth process and, like the first hard-soled shoes, assist in bridging transitional growth periods in reading.

While it is relatively simple to enter a shoe store with an eight-year-old or a ten-year-old and fit them with a visibly appropriate pair of new shoes that matches their level of physical growth, it is not that way with books. The classifications of children's tradebooks by the publishers serve to obfuscate reader appropriateness. (Is a picture book designed to be read *by* a five-year-old or *to* a five-year-old?) The three large classifications of children's fiction that most educators and publishers tend to agree upon are (1) picture books, (2) easy-to-read books, and (3) children's fiction, which includes many sub-classifications (see Huck, Arbuthnot, and Trelease). The beginning reader who has mastered basic vocabulary and finds easy-to-reads pinching her reading toes is ready and anxious to move on, but *The Brothers Karamazov* or a children's novel such as *Bridge to Terabithia* are still too big for her. How does a parent or teacher help her select a book to bridge the reading growth gap that will also fit her intellectual, emotional, and social growth?

In *The Read-Aloud Handbook*, Jim Trelease identifies a classification of children's books which he calls "short novels." He cautions parents and teachers that children as listeners must progress gradually in the length of the books and complexity of the stories they can comprehend. He suggests short novels as an ideal bridge between picture books and novels for the young listener.

> Having been read a few short novels, your ... child may be ready for the full-length novel. Perhaps the biggest difference between reading aloud the short novel and the full-length novel is the amount of description in the latter. The shorter book keeps its description to a minimum, whereas the longer book allows for greater development of character, plot, and setting. (p. 54)

He compares the listener to the runner. "Just as the runner doesn't achieve endurance overnight, neither do listeners. You must start slowly and build" (p. 53). Trelease spells out a program for building and extending the skill of young listeners, employing bridging techniques.

Pearson, writing in *Language Arts*, "Research Update: Listening Comprehension," agrees. "There appears to be a language comprehension system of which reading and listening are complementary facets." (p. 619) Of the two modes, he notes that listening is the stronger in all but mature readers, and training in listening comprehension is directly transferable to reading comprehension, although the transfer is task specific.

Indeed, one of the components in ascertaining reading expectancy is listening comprehension level (see Silvaroli and Ekwall). It is possible for a fourth grader to be reading instructionally at a second grade level, yet have a listening comprehension level equivalent to sixth grade on the same Informal Reading Inventory (IRI). A teacher or parent can assume from this discrepancy that if all processing systems were equally and efficiently developed at this time, the child would function in reading comprehension of the same material at a sixth grade level also. The second grade material the child is capable of reading herself does not match the sophistication of her listening level. Like the college age ESL or

FL student and the pre-school listener, the immature reader in growth transition needs the support of literature structure to bridge the growth gap.

Patricia Cianciolo, writing in *Language Arts*, "No Small Challenge: Literature for the Transitional Readers," defines transitional readers as . . . "typically eight to eleven year olds who can read fairly independently and are mature enough for fairly lengthy stories but need to sharpen and extend their reading comprehension and critical thinking skills." (p. 72). Rather than defining transitional readers as belonging to a specific age group or as a deficit model of readers (i.e., readers who lack comprehension skills), this paper will focus on transition as a positive growth model recognizing, however, that many transitional readers will fall into the eight to eleven year old category. Huck refers to these readers as "children in transition." (p. 75).

In "Mathew Effects in Reading," Stanovitch (1986) discusses the interrelationships between cognitive processes and reading. In developmental stages, a lag in development of a cognitive process may merely be indicative of developing reading skill rather than the cause of lagging reading ability. A child lagging in development in one process (phonological awareness) may tend to rely more heavily on another (context clues), leaving less cognitive capacity "to build a model for meaning" (Johnson, 1983).

According to Durkin in *Teaching Them to Read* (1983), readers typically utilize three cue systems --syntactic, semantic, and graphophonic -- simultaneously when making sense out of text. The reader still growing in phonological awareness can, therefore, bolster text comprehension by relying more heavily on the structure and context clues the text provides. Within this paper, therefore, a transitional reader can be thought of as any reader who relies more heavily on the support of one or more cue systems in comprehending text while another essential cue system is still developing or growing.

Historically, attempts to control the difficulty of text for readers focused on vocabulary control (i.e., the McGuffey Readers, 1836) and later, with the development of linear readability formulae, on control of sentence length and number of multisyllabic

words. Text legibility (type face, type size, white space, etc.) is the oldest area of research interest in factors affecting text comprehension. (See Venezsky, *Handbook of Reading Research*, 1983.) Until recently, little attention has been given to the role text structure, woven, as it is, within the three cue systems, plays in the comprehension process. Huck observes . . . "some theories focus on what is read, while others focus on the reader. Psycholinguists, for instance, examine in careful detail the structure of a story....Research indicates that (it) can affect the way readers understand and recall the story." (p. 72)

In the introduction to *Our English: A Cross Cultural Reader for ESL*, Pugh writes

> The short story is especially well suited to second language learning for a number of reasons. Usually a story will have one main character, a focused setting and plot, and one predominant theme. The compactness and clear structure of some stories provide the support that readers need to gain meaning from context as well as from words and syntax. The short story can provide natural language in a form characterized by manageable length and complexity, strong context support, and popular interest. p. 5

Pugh's description of the text needs of ESL readers in transition is much the same as Trelease's description of the text needs of listeners in transition. It can therefore be hypothesized that immature readers still involved in reading growth could profit similarly from the support of text with the characteristics described by Trelease and Pugh, and that such literature indeed exists in tradebook form.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to define an already existing body of literature in trade books whose intrinsic characteristics provide a superstructure of support that make it particularly suitable for and attractive to readers engaged in ongoing growth beyond beginning or emergent reading who, for whatever reason, cannot be considered mature or independent enough readers to engage comfortably a text form such as "the novel."

It will explore the characteristics of the genre; trace its roots and origins; provide examples of transitional literature available in tradebooks and reasons why children like or dislike them; attempt to establish judgement criteria; and supply a list of such literature for use in classrooms and suggestions for ways to use it.

WHAT IS IT? DEFINITION

Transitional literature is first and foremost, literature -- a good story. It elicits a response in seven-year-olds, eleven-year-olds, and adults. It is a "chapter book" in which each chapter possesses "text integrity" in that it can stand on its own without the rest of the book. Each chapter, however, is loosely linked to the whole by a thread which may be a common character or context.

The chapters need not be read in sequence, nor is it necessary to read the whole book to enjoy one chapter. The first chapter is usually a "frame story."

As in Trelease's "short novels," description is kept to a minimum. As in short stories, the chapters in a transitional book are compact, with a clear structure of manageable length and complexity with strong context support and enduring popular interest. But unlike that of a short novel, the plot in a volume of transitional literature is usually resolved at the end of each chapter. Unlike a collection of short stories, the chapters in a transitional book are loosely linked to impel the reader to decide to read on, but it is clearly reader's choice. It may be the very fact that the reader achieves closure at the end of a chapter and must recommit to the next chapter that makes these books so appealing. They satisfy the reader's semantic drive for meaning -- the resolution to the tonic chord.

The vocabulary in transitional books is not deliberately controlled like that in easy-to-read books. Sentence structure is also not deliberately controlled, but is less complex than that of most children's novels. Transitional books contain the skillful, sparse prose of good adult fiction, as well as crystal clear structure. Adult writers, such as Isaac Asimov, Roald

Dahl, Ray Bradbury, and Judith Viorst are among the authors who successfully write transitional literature. (see Appendix B for examples).

WHAT ARE SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GENRE?

Transitional literature incorporates many characteristics inherent in all literature, whether it is written for children or adults. Mature readers, listeners, or native speakers can successfully comprehend and enjoy texts which do not include all of these components; however, the reader and listener still growing in reading skill is supported with text that includes eight characteristics, which will be discussed in more detail and illustrated with excerpts from the genre. These include:

1. Universal appeal
2. Clear structure
3. Text integrity within chapters
4. Spare prose
5. Frame story
6. Limited illustration
7. Simplified graphic layout and type face
8. Limited reader commitment

Universal Appeal: Good transitional literature, like most good literature, appeals to a wide range of ages and ability groups. A good story is, after all, a good story. "Any book that can hold the attention and lift the imaginations of six-year-olds as well as eleven-year-olds has to have magic in it." (Trelease, p.55). Quoting Dr. Daniel Fader, Trelease reiterates the axiom that "semi-literate readers do not need semi-literate books." (p.58).

Indeed the universal appeal of transitional books usually contributes to their early demise. They are frequently the most read books in the classroom and library. "Good readers" steal them from less competent readers. There is no stigma attached to reading them. The problem is their scarcity. Like the little boy in the book *Mike's House* whose favorite book was the classic *Mike Mulligan* and who consequently called the public library

"Mike's house," children frequently develop strong, childhood-long attachments to their first transitional book. It is not uncommon to have fights occur among classmates over temporary custody of a sole copy of one of these books.

Clear Structure: All transitional books are what children call "chapter books." The uniqueness of transitional books lies in their superstructure. As in a short story, there is definite form and structure within each chapter of the book, but as in a novel there is an overarching structure in the book as a whole. It is the superstructuring, or double structuring of the transitional book which supports overall comprehension in the growing reader. It is also the superstructuring in transitional books which makes them so difficult to write. It demands the skill of a Ray Bradbury, an Isaac Asimov, or a Roald Dahl, someone who has internalized the form and structure of story and is able to distill it down to its very essence while preserving the magic.

Text Integrity Within Chapters: What is text integrity? Text integrity is a wholistic concept which refers not to the form or structure of text but certainly includes it. For the purposes of this paper it shall be defined as a quality intrinsic to a creative work that gives it life separate and apart from its creator, audience, format, and context. From the writer's perspective, good text is a creative entity unto itself. It has the ability like any work of art to convey its message in a unique manner and stand alone. In fact, many writers have published one chapter from a transitional book in a magazine setting prior to publication of the entire book.

Peter Johnson in *Reading Comprehension Assessment: A Cognitive Basis* (1983), discusses text and the role it plays in comprehension. He points to the research on story grammars, content, structure, language, schemata, background knowledge, writer-reader relationship, and communication as social interaction, as a window through which one can view the extrinsic factors which shape our understanding of text comprehension. He also speaks to a quality of "well-formedness" inherent in text itself, an elusive property. This appears to be the wholistic, undefinable quality of writing which explains the talents of E.

B. White, Ernest Hemingway, Isaac Asimov, Judy Blume, and others. M. Jerry Weiss puzzles that "... hardly a word appears to explain the unique internal, mental, emotional, and creative processes employed by literary giants in producing their products." (p.762). He further quotes Archibald Macleish: "Writers, if they are worthy of that jealous designation, do not write for other writers. They write to give reality to experience." (p.762).

From the reader's perspective, one or more chapters in a transitional book may strike a response in that reader, just as children recognize some personal societal value in their favorite fairy tale. In describing transitional readers, Cianciolo writes, "Children are attracted to a book more for the mere appeal of its format....The story often answers in varying degrees ... such basic common questions children ask in their own way: 'Who am I?', 'Why am I like I am?', 'What is life?', 'What is the human experience"', 'What is my (the) world?'" These are fundamental concerns of all children (and of all human beings, regardless of age). (p. 76).

It is this kind of intrinsic integrity present and complete in each chapter of a transitional book that causes it to live separate and apart from its context within the book. It exists not only as document but as creative entity for the writer. It speaks personally to certain readers. This quality of text integrity supports, affirms, and compels the reader all at once.

Spare Prose: The prose in transitional literature possesses a quality of spareness that comes in the most skillful kind of writing, an almost poetic economy. While the vocabulary and sentence length are not deliberately controlled to maintain a certain readability average, the economy is apparent. The prose frequently is characterized by the perceptible rhythm found in good adult prose. Dialogue exists only to develop character and move the story. The economy of word and the rhythm are present more from skillful writing than from conscious intent on the part of the author. A master "wordsmith" just uses the tools with more efficiency.

Sarah, Plain and Tall. **Patricia MacLachlan, 1985, Harper & Row. pp.14-15.**

The next day Papa went to town to mail his letter to Sarah. It was rainy for days, and the clouds followed. The house was cool and damp and quiet. Once I set four places at the table, then I caught myself and put the extra plate away. Three lambs were born, one with a black face. And then Papa's letter came. It was very short.

Dear Jacob,
I will come by train. I will wear a yellow bonnet.
I am plain and tall.
Sarah

"What's that?" asked Caleb excitedly, peering over Papa's shoulder. He pointed. "There, written at the bottom of the letter."

Papa read it to himself. Then he smiled, holding up the letter for us to see.

Tell them I sing was all it said.

Frame Story: The employment of the "frame story" is an ancient technique preserved in the oral tradition of many cultures. Probably one of the best known examples is the story of 'Scheherazade,' the frame story of *The Thousand and One Nights* from the eleventh century Indo-Persian culture. "A frame story is one that provides a context and excuse for a limitless series of independent `substories'." (McGuire p.38)

Most transitional literature provides a frame story as the first chapter of a book which establishes the main character, provides background and setting, and develops the child's schema for the rest of the book. The child is then free to embellish the setting and character development with each new story/chapter but within the original context. "They appeal to their insatiable appetite for several stories about the same characters (reflecting their inclination to collect things and their desire for a friend that is predictable yet exciting to be with)." (Cianciolo, p. 75). Development of the reader's schema for the rest of the book and its sequels is an important component which facilitates comprehension by freeing up cognitive capacity which makes the reader's task more comfortable.

***Homer Price*. Robert McCloskey, 1943, Viking Press, pp. 10-11.**

THE CASE OF THE SENSATIONAL SCENT

About two miles outside of Centerburg where route 56 meets route 56A there lives a boy named Homer. Homer's father owns a tourist camp. Homer's mother cooks fried chicken and hamburgers in the lunch room and takes care of the tourist cabins while his father takes care of the filling station. Homer does odd jobs about the place. Sometimes he washes windshields of cars to help his father, and sometimes he sweeps out cabins or takes care of the lunch room to help his mother.

When Homer isn't going to school, or doing odd jobs, or playing with other boys, he works on his hobby which is building radios. He has a workshop in one corner of his room where he works in the evenings.

Before going to bed at night he usually goes down to the kitchen to have a glass of milk and cookies because working on radios makes him hungry. Tabby, the family cat, usually comes around for something to eat too.

One night Homer came down and opened the ice box door, and poured a saucer of milk for Tabby and a glass of milk for himself. He put the bottle back and looked to see if there was anything interesting on the other shelves. He heard footsteps and felt something soft brush his leg so he reached down to pet Tabby. When he looked down the animal drinking the milk certainly wasn't a cat! It was a skunk!

Limited Use of Illustration: Transitional literature typically limits use of illustration throughout the book. Illustrations are characteristically line sketches. For the first time in the life of the reader, meaning is constructed entirely from reading the text, unlike picture books and easy-to-read books where the importance of illustration in constructing meaning frequently rivals or overshadows the text. Whereas, in picture books at least fifty percent of the meaning can be constructed from illustration, the reader of transitional books must employ mental imagery. "If the literary selection is well written, the transitional readers will forget they are reading words printed on a page and 'see' vividly the characters, action, setting, and atmosphere that make up a memorable story." (Cianciolo, p. 76).

***The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*. Barbara Robinson, 1972, Avon Books. p. 1.**

The Herdmans were absolutely the worst kids in the history of the world. They lied and stole and smoked cigars (even the girls) and talked dirty and hit little kids and cussed their teachers and took the name of the

> Lord in vain and set fire to Fred Shoemaker's old broken-down toolhouse.
>
> The toolhouse burned right down to the ground, and I think that surprised the Herdmans. They set fire to things all the time, but that was the first time they managed to burn down a whole building.
>
> I guess it was an accident. I don't suppose they woke up that morning and said to one another, "Let's go burn down Fred Shoemaker's toolhouse" ... but maybe they did. After all, it was a Saturday, and not much going on.

Simplified Graphic Layout and Type Face: The text of stories in transitional books typically lends itself to a simplified graphic layout. Although paragraphing is an artificial creation existing in printed text and not in orally related stories, the spare prose which characterizes transitional literature makes for short paragraphs. Chapters are also shorter than those in most children's novels. Large, plain type faces and good use of white space serve to aid the comprehension of transitional readers.

> ***Sarah, Plain and Tall.*** **Patricia MacLachlan, 1985, Harper & Row. p.44.**
>
> The rain came and passed, but strange clouds hung in the northwest, low and black and green. And the air grew still.
>
> In the morning, Sarah dressed in a pair of overalls and went to the barn to have an argument with Papa. She took apples for Old Bess and Jack.
>
> "Women don't wear overalls," said Caleb, running along behind her like one of Sarah's chickens.
>
> "This woman does," said Sarah crisply.

Limited Reader Commitment: Like Trelease's metaphor of the limited endurance of a beginning runner, the transitional reader's endurance is quickly overloaded. To the transitional reader, commitment to reading an entire book is as overwhelming as the commitment to completing a marathon would be to a neophyte runner.

With a transitional book it is always reader's choice to go on to another chapter. Because the chapters are short, the reader is guaranteed success within a chapter. After the frame story a child can choose to go on and read the next chapter, or a chapter in another section of the book if that is more appealing. The reader is in charge and in control of the

amount of commitment that will bring success. The plot does not demand that the reader complete the entire book. The child, consequently, does not feel overwhelmed.

If the child's endurance lasts for only one chapter, that is fine. The child experiences closure and success. The child is free to complete two or four or six chapters. The child is free to skip chapters. Satiety and commitment are renegotiable with each chapter. The book is a complete banquet and the child is free to choose and sample at will, be it dessert or soup. The child always has the option to return for the full meal later.

***A Gathering Of Days, A New England Girl's Journal, 1830-1832.* Joan Blos, 1979, Macmillan Company.pp.52-53.**

Friday, March18,1831
Today I am fourteen years old!
While I prepared our mid-day dinner Father came to talk about the day that I was born. He remembers well it had snowed nine inches just before my birth, and ten the day preceding. Most of the previous snow had melted and they'd had flooding on River Street down in Holderness. The sun's first rays came in to the room as I came in to the world. They'd wrapped me well and there, with my mother, I lay in the room which they'd planned for the purpose and called the borning room.
(Later my mother died in that room, but none ever called it a dying room that I heard tell about. I do not like to think of it-her face that had gone on a sudden old, and all its colour gone.)
Father this morning was full of good cheer & told how proud and happy they'd been, the house being newly completed and now graced with a child.
He had three acres mowing, he says, and half a one arable. One each of horse, & cow, and ox- the latter my mother had nursed to health when no one else was able. (The horse died just before she did. Was injured, sickened, up & died. We never got another.)
The whole first year they had only a table, some benches my mother had brought from her home, and a pot for cooking.

WHERE DID IT COME FROM? ROOTS AND ORIGINS

The forerunner of most successful twentieth century children's literature is the fairy tale. Why have fairy tales survived from all cultures and through all time? "The fairy tale confirms what the child has been thinking all along -- that it is a cold cruel world out there waiting to eat him alive." (Treaease p.49). It offers the child hope that he too can survive.

While the fable preaches to the child, the fairy tale allows the child to figure out the message unaided. And, the message may change as the child's perspective changes.

Fairy tales, like adult fiction, deal with life's basic issues. The Grimms' original collection of tales was gathered from adults and published for adults. The Grimms' task was one of conservation. Only later were the stories rewritten for children from the all-too-realistic original versions. "Even when you go beyond the picture book, some of the best writers for children often follow the lead of the fairy tale." (Trelease p.51)

While collections of fairy tales present different problem solving situations common in life, they are much like a collection of short stories, separate and unrelated. Storytellers in ancient cultures solved the problem of unrelated plots by linking stories into a story cycle propelled by a frame story which gave a raison d'etre for many stories to come. The tradition has evolved today into the two-hour season opener or pilot for a new television series or soap opera. Star Trek successfully used this formula. Chaucer used the device for setting up *Canterbury Tales*. James Herriot hooked many adult non-transitional readers with this ploy in his series of best selling books on the life of a country veterinarian in Yorkshire. Good transitional literature uses the story within a story to present a variety of tales linked by a golden thread of commonality.

CAN YOU GIVE AN EXAMPLE?

If transitional books are so neat, where have they been hiding? The problem with transitional literature is indeed locating and identifying it. Few authors set out to write such books deliberately. It is just as easy to expand a story line and turn out a full-blown novel. Also, very few books currently in print satisfy all the criteria.

The oldest and probably most successful transitional book is *Homer Price* by Robert McCloskey. It was published in 1943 and still compels young readers. It is a series of six tales about a small town, Midwestern childhood. All are still funny and believable

forty-five years later. Of those six tales, the one about the magic doughnut machine remains the most memorable for children.

***Homer Price*. Robert McCloskey, 1943, Viking Press, pp. 57-58.**

After a few dozen more doughnuts had rolled down the little chute, Homer said, "I guess that's about enough doughnuts to sell to the after theater customers. I'd better turn the machine off for a while."

Homer pushed the button marked "Stop" and there was a little click, but nothing happened. The rings of batter kept right on dropping into the hot fat, and an automatic gadget kept right on turning them over, and another automatic gadget kept right on giving them a little push and the doughnuts kept right on rolling down the little chute, all ready to eat.

There is a sequel called *Centerburg Tales*. Interestingly, the tales in *Homer Price* and its sequel have a classical, homeric flavor, and the name of the town, Centerburg, would almost make one believe McCloskey was aware of the classic tale-within-a-tale device when he set out to write the books. Indeed, that may be why these two books are such clear examples of the genre.

***Centerburg Tales* by Robert McCloskey,1951, Viking Press. pp. 13-14.**

As they went into the the bank, the banker was just opening the heavy door of the vault.

"Just step inside, Mr. Dooner," he said. "Here is the deposit box, number one hundred and thirteen."

"It's about time," growled Dulcey, jabbing his key into the lock.

The sheriff, the barber, Uncle Ulysses, and Homer all crowded up to the counter and peered through the bars to watch.

Dulcey turned the key and pulled out the box. His hands shook so much with excitement that he had trouble opening the lid. He managed to get it open and then let out a wild howl!

"What kinda joke is this?" he yelled, and he jumped around something awful, banging the vault, bumping the banker, and bumping the lawyer.

"Take care, Mr. Dooner! You'll break it!" shouted the banker, grabbing Dulcey by the arm before he could throw the something that was in the box.

"Of all the lousy tricks!" growled Dulcey, holding a small glass jar up to the light.

"What's in it?" Uncle Ulysses demanded through the paying teller window.

"Aw, nuts!" said Dulcey, giving the jar a shake.

"Did you say nuts?" asked the sheriff.

"No!" yelled Dulcey. "It's a lousy jar of seeds!"

"A most unusual place for keeping seeds," said the banker.

"Maybe they are unusual seeds," suggested Homer.

"Yes, Dulcey, they are no doubt very valuable seeds," said the lawyer. "That little glass jar may be worth a fortune. Look here, there's a label that says EXPERIMENT 13."

The thought of owning a jar of valuable seeds made Dulcey less mad, but he was far from happy. He shook his head sadly and said, "People inherit money every day, and I have to be the one that inherits a jar of seeds-an experiment at that!"

"What are you going to do with your seeds, Dulcey?" asked Homer.

"Well," said Dulcey, rubbing his chin, "I'll plant some of them, I guess."

Beverly Cleary is the one author who has devoted a writing career to producing books for transitional readers. Huck also identifies Cleary as a writer of transitional books. (p. 25). As a classroom teacher, Cleary tried to encourage her reluctant readers, many of whom were boys, to read more. When they complained that there was little for them to read, she discovered they were right. So *Henry Huggins* (1950) was born, and a successful series of books about Henry, his dog Ribsy, Beezus, Ramona and the whole Klickitat Street gang.

***Henry Huggins* by Beverly Cleary, 1950, William Morrow & Company. pp.22-24.**

Crackle, crackle, crackle. Thump, thump, thump.

Ribsy scratched his way out of the bag.

"Well, I'll be doggoned!" exclaimed the fat man and began to laugh."I'll be doggoned!"

"It's just a skinny old dog," said Scooter.

"He is not! He's a good dog."

Henry tried to keep Ribsy between his knees. The bus lurched around the corner and started to go uphill. Henry was thrown against the fat man. The frightened dog wiggled away from him, squirmed between the passengers, and started for the front of the bus.

"Here, Ribsy, old boy! Come back here," called Henry and started after him.

"E-e-ek! A dog!" squealed the lady with the bag of apples. "Go away,doggie, go away!"

Ribsy was scared. He tried to run and crashed into the lady's bag of apples. The bag tipped over and the apples began to roll toward the back of the bus, which was grinding up a steep hill. The apples rolled around the feet of the people who were standing. Passengers began to slip and slide. They dropped their packages and grabbed one another.

Crash! A high-school girl dropped an armload of books.

Rattle! Bang! Crash! A lady dropped a big paper bag. The bag broke open and pots and pans rolled out.

Thud! A man dropped a coil of garden hose. The hose unrolled and the passengers found it wound around their legs.

People were sitting on the floor. They were sitting on books and apples. They were even sitting on other people's laps. Some of them had their hats over their faces and their feet in the air.

Skree-e-etch! The driver threw on the brakes and turned around in his seat just as Henry made his way through the apples and books and pans and hose to catch Ribsy.

The driver pushed his cap back on his head. "O.K., sonny," he said to Henry. "Now you know why dogs aren't allowed on buses!"

"Yes, sir," said Henry in a small voice. "I'm sorry."

"You're sorry! A lot of good that does. Look at this bus! Look at those people!"

"I didn't mean to make any trouble," said Henry. "My mother said I could keep the dog if I could bring him home on the bus."

Cleary knows kids, but adults don't mind reading her books aloud.

Another oldie but goodie that has transitional characteristics has recently been reprinted in paper back form for another generation of children to enjoy. Oliver Butterworth's *Enormous Egg* was first published in 1956. It is the story of the problems of a New Hampshire boy who hatches a pet dinosaur from an egg.

***The Enormous Egg*. Oliver Butterworth, 1956, Dell Publishing Co., pp. 39-40.**

"Hello there, Nate. That you?"

"Yes, Dr. Ziemer. The egg finally hatched out."

"It did? Is it alive?"

"Sure is," I said.

"What's it look like, Nate? Can you describe it?"

"Well, it's a queer-looking thing. Looks like a big lizard, except that it's got little horns on the ---"

There was a kind of whoop on the other end of the phone, and Dr. Ziemer yelled, "I'll be right over," and then there was a crashing sound, as if he'd forgotten to let go of the receiver.

Many children get their first taste of history through historical biography. Clyde Robert Bulla combines authentic historical details within a story framework suitable for transitional readers. A prolific writer, Bulla has more than fifty books in print. Boys with a bent for content will frequently run through all his books on a library shelf. Two of the best

are *Down The Mississippi* and *Riding The Pony Express*. Bulla has a wonderful sense of word economy.

> ***Down the Mississippi*. Clyde Robert Bulla, 1954, Scholastic Book Services, p. 36.**
>
> Erik looked out. He saw the woodpile. And he saw something else. There were men pulling at the big oars. The raft swung slowly away from the wharf. People on the shore began to wave. Simpson's brother stood on the wharf, but he did not wave.
>
> "We're moving!" cried Erik.
>
> "Yes," said the cook. "Here we go."
>
> The big island of logs moved slowly out into the current. They were on their way down the Mississippi.

> ***Riding the Pony Express*. Clyde Robert Bulla, 1948, Scholastic Book Services, pp. 71-72.**
>
> All at once Dick knew. The shadows were wolves.
>
> He felt cold, and his mouth was dry. He had never liked to hear the wolves howl at night. Now he was riding with a pack of them at his heels.
>
> If the wolves were hungry enough they might run at Lady's side and drag her down. Or Lady might fall and throw him off in the trail.
>
> He held tight to the saddle. His hand touched a leather pocket. He felt something hard inside. His father's pistol!
>
> He pulled it out. He was careful not to drop it.
>
> He turned in the saddle and pointed the pistol at the nearest wolf. He fired.
>
> The wolf jumped high into the air and fell. The other wolves sprang upon it. Dick heard them howling and fighting.

The appendix contains a list of books field tested by the author on transitional readers with varying reading skills, ages, interests, backgrounds, and abilities in Charleston, Missouri, classrooms from 1980 to 1985. Not all books work with all children, but most children will latch onto an author or a series that pleases them. Therefore, the list indicates whether other books by the author are available.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF IT'S GOOD? QUALITY CRITERIA

Most quality criteria for children's literature is devised by adults to be used by adults for the purpose of judging books for children. While adults are the ultimate selectors

of what gets written, what gets published, what gets advertised, what gets purchased, and what gets recommended in the area of books for children, children ultimately do the reading. And children, contrary as they are, only read what they like, not what's currently fashionable or on some best-seller list. Cinderella did not endure because of an award or medal, but because it evoked a response and conveyed a societal message.

Therefore, in judging transitional literature for children an adult needs to bear in mind that success with children is the ultimate test of a story. Beyond that, the six characteristics previously identified can be applied. A book that has stood the test of time surely has universal appeal.

The very best way to judge a book's quality is to borrow a copy from the library and try it out on yourself and a child. A dog-eared battered library copy with many check-out stamps is liable to be a better choice than a well-preserved, rarely stamped model. According to Patricia Cianciloa, "It is not easy to find, among the books published during any one publishing season, more than several titles that are well-designed, which contain beautiful graphics, and the kind of content and language which offer the transitional readers a variety of images, plots, and themes and vicarious experiences which will inspire, provoke thoughtfulness, and offer satisfying reading fare for 'the transitional readers'." (p. 73). The ultimate goodness criteria is ... a transitional book is good if it motivates a transitional reader to read.

HOW CAN YOU USE TRANSITIONAL LITERATURE IN THE CLASSROOM?

One characteristic of a transitional reader is that her listening capacity level exceeds her reading comprehension level. One of the jobs accomplished by transitional books is to allow the child to increase reading times to a level more in keeping with the higher listening level. The pared plot in transitional books satisfies the child's semantic drive (see Holdaway), while the simplified graphic layout and type face boost comprehension levels.

The teacher can also increase comprehension employing the child's stronger listening capacity, by reading aloud the frame story and one or two other selections alternately with the reader.

A transitional reader is usually a reader with a narrow reading focus. Children, like adults, either from habit or perverseness, tend to stay in a reading rut, reading the same kinds of books over and over. By sampling a variety of transitional literature through reading aloud, timid readers are supported in branching out with their reading interests.

Text sets of transitional books are always scarce. Most transitional readers won't read a book in one sitting and that slows down book circulation. One way to move a book and guarantee continued movement in a classroom situation is to take a paperback copy of a book, read the frame story aloud, and then cut the book into chapters before the children's eyes. Tagboard covers can be stapled on and a six chapter book can circulate in a week among six children. If you allot the weakest reader the best chapter, a better reader will assist with the reading to get hands on that section the next day.

CONCLUSION

A quote from Pearson and Johnson defines reading comprehension: "... comprehension is building bridges between the new and the known...." (Johnson p.6). All readers, adults and children, are involved in growth across their life as readers. Even adult readers are sometimes in transition. Adults seek the comfortable, familiar structure of a science fiction book, a mystery thriller, or a collection of short stories and are thought none the worse for the experience. A young person in transition in his or her life as a reader can use the similar structure present in transitional literature as a bridge to meaning and comprehension at a higher level. The coupling of an appropriate literature for reading with listening can support a younger reader's transition toward reading maturity. Quoting the

Senegalese poet, Leopold Sedar Senghor in the book *Once Upon A Time*, Ashley Bryan reminds that stories unite childhood to Eden, present to past, life to death, time and space...

"Un pont de douceur les relie." (A tender bridge connects them.) (p.53)

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APPENDIX
SUGGESTED TRANSITIONAL LITERATURE TITLES

AUTHOR	TITLE	
Richard & Florence Atwater	*Mr. Popper's Penguins*	(1938)
Joan Blos	*A Gathering of Days*	(1979)
Judy Blume	*Freckle Juice*	(1971)
	Super Fudge	(1980)
	Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing	(1972)
Michael Bond	Paddington books	(1960)
Clyde Robert Bulla	*Down the Mississippi*	(1954)
	The Ghost of Windy Hill	(1968)
	Riding the Pony Express	(1948)
Oliver Butterworth	*The Enormous Egg*	(1956)
Beverly Cleary	*Beezus and Ramona*	(1955)
	Henry Huggins	(1950)
	Ramona the Pest	(1968)
	Henry and Beezus	(1952)
Roald Dahl	*Fantastic Mr. Fox*	(1970)
	James and the Giant Peach	(1961)
	The Magic Finger	(1966)
Eleanor Estes	*The Hundred Dresses*	(1944)
Astrid Lindgren	Pippi Longstocking books	(1950)
Patricia MacLachlan	*Sarah, Plain and Tall*	(1985)
Ellen Macregor	Miss Pickerell books	(1951)
Robert McCloskey	*Centerburg Tales*	(1951)
	Homer Price	(1943)
Robert Newton Peck	*Soup*	(1974)
John Peterson	The Littles books	(1970)
Barbara Robinson	*The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*	(1972)
Thomas Rockwell	*How to Eat Fried Worms*	(1973)
Robert K. Smith	*Chocolate Fever*	(1978)

Donald Sobol	Encyclopedia Brown books	(1973)
Gertrude Warner	*The Boxcar Children*	(1924)
Jay Williams & Raymond Abrashkin	Danny Dunn books	(1964)

NOTE: All of the books included in the above list have been field tested in elementary classrooms on children in grades two through six by the author. They have been used with disabled readers in a clinic setting on the campus of Southeast Missouri State University during the summers of 1986 and 1987. This list and a more extended version of the list formed the core of the summer reading program at the Mississippi County Library in Charleston, Missouri, during the summer of 1983. Longitudinal records and test data on the children with whom the material was used is available.